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ABSTRACT

Faculty senates and similar units have long held a place in college and university decision making. This study was undertaken to determine how college presidents perceive faculty involvement in governance. A 3-round Delphi survey was conducted, and a total of 23 of the initial 30 college presidents completed all 3 rounds. Results suggest that presidents are not as enthusiastic about faculty governance as previously thought, but faculty involvement is valued greatly in areas such as curriculum development. Presidential ratings plainly indicate the perspective that shared governance is not an integral component of institutional decision making and management. (SLD)

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The College President's Perspective on Faculty Involvement in Governance

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Abstract

Faculty senates and similar units have long held a place in college and university decision-making. Failure to include college presidents in this issue is dangerous, and the current exploratory study was subsequently undertaken. Baseline data on how college presidents perceive faculty involvement in governance was developed using a three-round Delphi survey. Results suggest that presidents are not as enthusiastic about faculty governance as previously thought, but involvement is greatly valued in such areas as curriculum development.

College and universities represent democratic behavior on many different levels. They reflect the democratic will of their sponsors, such as church bodies and state populations. They teach representative behaviors and model democracy through student government and they make use of democratic behaviors in reaching decisions about how the campus can be operated. Although college presidents must face all three layers of representative thinking, the internal operations of sharing authority through faculty democracy is the primary issue of the current study.

The rationale for an institution to involve faculty in governance includes many benefits, including increasing feelings of ownership. Evans (1999) outlined a host of positive impacts sharing governance can have on an institution, including improved or enhanced morale, more creative policy formation, grass roots support for decisions and policy, greater buy-in for difficult situation solutions, and more support and effort by faculty to accomplish the work identified.

These ideas are not necessarily new, and have been identified frequently in management literature (Miles, 1965; Miller, 1999). The notion of their use and effectiveness in higher education, however, is relatively unexplored with a great deal of speculation and assumption present in this use as a motivation for supporting faculty co-governance. Many of these ideas have been supporting tools in the Total Quality Management (TQM) initiatives that have been popular on college campuses recently, and all function on the most basic concept of empowering workers to create better 'production.'

The idea is not always embraced, as evidenced by some private sector businesses that have attempted to utilize a team-based philosophy (Nelson & Watts, 2000). These

businesses have found that workers do not always embrace taking on more responsibility, particularly when managers are employed to accomplish the same tasks. A car manufacturer, for example, boasted of "empowering" front-line workers with the ability to stop production if they noted a deficiency in a car as it moved down the assembly line. In this environment, workers could protest (a) the responsibility for the total car quality when many different individuals are employed to build it, (b) the idea that equal peers are suddenly evaluating each other's work quality, (c) the fiscal cost of stopping an entire assembly line when the extent of the rationale is unknown, and (d) professional quality managers efforts being interpreted as "pushed down" to the least well compensated.

The argument, as implied, works in both directions, as front line workers in any business are usually the first to notice quality problems. For colleges and universities, though, it is a difficult problem because there are many different levels of front-line workers, and those on the academic assembly line have little interest, and often little expertise, in the overall governance of the institution.

Context of Faculty Involvement

Shared governance activities have been commonplace in higher education for the past several decades, and elements of faculty governance can be traced to even the earliest colleges in Europe and North America. The historical arguments typically note that the absence of administrators forced teachers to take on managerial tasks. As Lucas (2000) noted, however, there has never existed an environment of equal sharing of power and authority between administrators and faculty. Baldridge (1982) referred to this as a fable about a lost kingdom.

Contemporary faculty involvement in governance has a great deal to do with assigning responsibilities and assuming authority over specific domains of action, power, and work. As the vast majority of college campuses make use of faculty governance units (Gilmour, 1991), a prime area for conflict and role definition lies between senior academic administrators and faculty. Further non-academic officers, including those in student affairs and business operations consult or ignore faculty, sometimes dependent upon the scope of the decision, but often dependent upon presidential directive. Presidential directives do not necessarily have to be written policies or formalized statements, and can include simple precedence and implied treatment based on modeled behavior. In any environment though, organizational performance is and can be linked to inclusiveness in decision-making.

A central question to university management is whether or not faculty can and should be involved in governance activities. Governance broadly, encompassing those sets of behaviors that share power, create policy, and allocate resources, has multiple layers of decision-making and importance. Although Miles (1997) is stringent in his definition of what faculty can and cannot do, the cultural, custom-based collective definition of higher education suggests at least some level of involvement. The benefits of inclusive decision-making have been well articulated, as have the draw backs. Indeed, the benefits and problems associated with shared governance have become part of the fable about faculty senates, on the one hand creating a collegial society, while simultaneously taking too long to reach decisions and serving only special interest groups and departments.

College presidents must determine their own reasoning, assess their campus' climate and culture, and determine to what extent and how they will involve faculty in decision-making. This involvement and the identification of the amount of involvement is a political process that by its very definition can create divisiveness and problems on campus, among a public, and among governing boards.

Research Methods

The current study, to determine a baseline, descriptive profile of the president's perspective on the value of faculty involvement in governance made use of a three-round Delphi survey. Using a random sample of 30 college presidents, all selected based on institution using a table of random numbers, the question was offered: what is your perspective, as a college president, on the value of faculty involvement in governance.

The question was first presented to a panel of three college presidents and modified with their input. Study participants were given two weeks to respond to the survey. Responses were collapsed and edited into survey stems and provided to the sample for them to rate their agreement with each. Respondents were instructed to use a 1-to-3 Likert-type scale, where 1 = Disagree with the statement and 3 = Agree with the statement. Following the second round rating, study participants were provided with group normative data and provided an opportunity to re-rate their initial agreement level with each item.

Findings

A total of 23 of the 30 (76%) college presidents completed all three rounds of the Delphi survey. In the initial round of the survey, presidents reported a wide variety of written comments that were distilled into 20 basic statements about their perspectives on

faculty involvement in governance. Approximately 17 statements developed by college presidents were considered duplicated and were combined into the 20 to be rated in the second and third round of the Delphi survey.

During the second round of the survey, respondents had an overall mean rating of the 20 items of 2.31. In the third round of the survey, the participating college presidents changed a total of 18 initial ratings (averaging fewer than one per participant) with a resulting increase in the overall mean rating to 2.40.

Over half of the mean ratings of the presidentially developed perceptions fell within the 2.50 to 3.00 range, indicating strong levels of agreement. The participating presidents rated a vigorous defense of academic freedom (mean 2.91, SD .288) and the essential nature of faculty governance in curriculum development (mean 2.91, SD .288) the highest (see Table 1). Also very strongly rated by presidents was the argument that faculty should focus more on teaching and less on institutional management (mean 2.87, SD .458), and that there is a need for the president to take a leadership role in faculty involvement in governance (mean 2.85, SD .359). Conversely, presidents agreed least with the argument that faculty governance increases commitment to the mission of the university (mean 1.65, SD .714). Presidents also tended to disagree with the notion that faculty feel the impact of policy decisions more then other constituencies due to their proximity to students (mean 1.82, SD .717), and that faculty governance is vital to an institution (mean 1.87, SD .920). On this last perception, nearly half of the responding presidents (n=11; valid 48%) indicated that they disagreed that faculty governance was vital by rating it "Disagree." Similarly, there was neither strong agreement or

disagreement with the statement "I strongly support faculty governance" (mean 2.00, SD .905), although 39% (valid) of the presidents disagreed with the notion.

Discussion

College presidents have an interest in how faculty are involved in governance issues, but that interest need not be unabashed enthusiasm and support. By identifying 20 unique aspects of how college presidents view shared governance, they provide a solid framework for framing various decision-making roles on campus. For example, one view of shared faculty governance allows for a system of checks and balances with college administrators, yet their study respondents seem to frame the work of faculty as related to curriculum, and extend far enough to discourage faculty governance in institutional management.

What is perhaps most striking about these study findings is the view that college presidents in fact do not blindly support faculty involvement in governance. Indeed, presidential ratings plainly spell out a perspective that shared governance is not an integral component of institutional decision-making and management. In fact, the very opposite seems to be suggested, and this idea is quite counter to much of the existing literature base. The result is the need for broad, generalizable study of college presidents and how they interact with faculty governance bodies. Only in doing so will institutions and all of their assorted parts be capable of streamlining effective decision-making and performing at levels of sophistication that can withstand any and all public (and private) accountability inquiries.

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Table 1.
Presidential Mean Rating of Perceptions of Faculty Involvement in Governance

Perception	Mean	Mode	SD
Presidents should vigorously defend the value of academic freedom.	2.91	3.00	.288
Faculty involvement in governance is essential in curriculum development.	2.91	3.00	.288
Faculty focus should be more on teaching and less on institutional management.	2.87	3.00	.458
There still is a need for the president to take a leadership role in faculty involvement in governance.	2.85	3.00	.359
We need to work with faculty on a common set of values.	2.82	3.00	.388
Faculty governance has a tradition in curricular issues.	2.78	3.00	.422
A college's success in achieving its mission and objectives relies on faculty support and participation in governance.	2.73	3.00	.449
Faculty have a conflict of interest with governance. A separation of powers and responsibilities is appropriate.	2.63	3.00	.581
Presidential leadership is most effective when faculty support is marshaled.	2.60	3.00	.656
Presidents should be the only report to the official governing body.	2.56	3.00	.507
Collaborative leadership invites input and dialogue.	2.56	3.00	.662
Faculty governance is limited to observer-participant for understanding and communication, but not for full governance.	2.30	3.00	.765
Faculty involvement in governance increases the level of awareness among faculty.	2.27	2.00	.703
Those who help create will also support.	2.08	2.00	.793

Faculty governance is absolutely crucial if there is to be buy-in.	2.00	2.00	.739
I strongly support faculty governance.	2.00	1.00	.905
Faculty governance increases their commitment to the university.	1.91	2.00	.668
Faculty governance is vital to the institution.	1.87	1.00	.920
Because faculty typically have the greatest influence on and interaction with students, they recognize and experience the impact of policy decisions as significantly as, and often more so than, any constituency group in an institution.	1.82	2.00	.717
Faculty governance increases their commitment to the mission of the university.	1.65	1.00	.714